



**Virginia Social
Services System**

**Strategic Planning
Frequently Asked
Questions**

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1. Introduction

This document contains some of the most common questions asked about strategic planning in general and specifically about the way in which strategic planning is being implemented within the Virginia Social Services System.

If you can not find the answer to your question within this document you are encouraged to use the “Contact Us” feature on the Virginia Social Services System’s Strategic Planning web site where via email you will be able to pose your question and receive an answer. In doing so you will be supplying invaluable information that can be used in making this document more effective.

2. Frequently Asked Questions

2.1 Q. *What is strategic planning?*

Answer: Strategic planning is a management tool, period. As with any management tool, it is used for one purpose only: to help an organization do a better job - to focus its energy, to ensure that members of the organization are working toward the same goals, to assess and adjust the organization's direction in response to a changing environment. In short, strategic planning is a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it, with a focus on the future.

2.2 Q. *What are the concepts of successful strategic planning?*

Answer: Successful strategic planning:

- leads to action
- builds a shared vision that is values-based
- is an inclusive, participatory process in which board and staff take on a shared ownership
- accepts accountability to the community
- is externally focused and sensitive to the organization's environment
- is based on quality data
- requires an openness to questioning the status quo
- is a key part of effective management.

2.3 Q. *What are the benefits of strategic planning?*

Answer: While there are many very real ancillary benefits, they all fall under the umbrella of the primary benefit, which is to optimize the organization’s future potential through the formulation and realization of a well-thought-out, sound, and appropriate overall course and direction.

2.4 Q. *Where can I get a copy of the VSSS Strategic Plan?*

Answer: You can obtain a copy of the strategic plan from two locations. It can be found on the strategic planning pages of the Local Agency web site or the strategic planning pages of the Public web site.

2.5 Q. *Where is all the information on VSSS Strategic Planning kept?*

Answer: A series of web pages have been implemented on the Local Agency web site that will provide all the information on the strategic planning process, the structures implemented, the roles and responsibilities etc. This area also has a an area dedicated to supply resources on the current model that can be adopted and utilized by any person or entity

2.6 Q. *Where can I find a definition of strategic planning components?*

Answer: The definitions of the strategic planning components can be found in the “VSSS Strategic Planning Glossary” document. This document is located in the “Tools and Documents” area of the of the strategic planning web site which can be accessed from the local agency home page.

2.7 Q. *Who do I contact if I have any questions about strategic planning?*

Answer: The email account “strategic.planning@dss.virginia.gov” has been set up specifically for this purpose.

2.8 Q. *Is there a requirement that all agencies in the Commonwealth have a strategic plan? If so, what is the requirement? (Statutory, regulatory, Executive Order?)*

Answer: There is a requirement for all state agencies to have a strategic plan. This requirement is part of House Bill 2097, which was passed in the 2003 session of the General Assembly. The bill establishes the Council for Virginia’s Future, which is a planning and advisory body chaired by the Governor. It also establishes the Roadmap for Virginia’s future, as strategic planning process to be implemented across all state agencies. For more information on this subject please refer to the Council for Virginia’s Future web site at www.future.virginia.gov.

2.9 Q. *How long does it take to develop the Department's strategic plan? Once done, is it finished, or is the plan subject to revision?*

Answer: The initial development of an organizations strategic plan is normally a relatively short process that can be completed in a number of weeks. However is should be recognized that the strategic plan is a living document and should be continuously reviewed and changed as the environment within which the organization operates changes. The true art of strategic planning is in the process(es) an organization implements to drive itself forward from the plan adjusting as it goes.

2.10 Q. *The current plan is in place through the end of fiscal year 2006. When will development of the new plan begin?*

Answer: Strategic planning is an iterative process and as such, if implemented correctly, the development of a new plan most likely would never occur. However the organization may elect to undertake major reviews of the plan at set periods.

2.11 Q. *Why have a strategic plan? Isn't the Department's work directed by the many different programs it runs?*

Answer: The ability to think about and execute the work an organization conducts in a strategic manner is of enormous benefit to itself and its customers. With the absence of strategic thinking and execution the organization will remain operational move from one day to the next with no long term direction or vision (*also see questions 2.1 and 2.3*)

2.12 Q. *Who was on the committee that develops the strategic plan?*

Answer: The development and maintenance of the Virginia Social Services System's strategic plan and planning process has always been an open process and one that seeks to include all the stakeholders. The initial strategic plan development was undertaken by a group including but not limited to:

- ❖ State Board of Social Services
- ❖ Local Agency Directors
- ❖ Virginia Council Against Poverty
- ❖ Child Day Care Council
- ❖ VISSTA
- ❖ Department of Planning and Budget
- ❖ Department of Social Services

The ongoing implementation and maintenance of the plan is being conducted by a group consisting of:

- ❖ State Board of Social Services
- ❖ Local Agency Directors
- ❖ Virginia Council Against Poverty
- ❖ Department of Social Services
- ❖ Business Community
- ❖ Higher Education
- ❖ Providers

2.13 Q. *Can employees participate in the strategic planning process?*

Answer: The implementation of an organizations strategic plan is something that should ultimately touch and affect ever individual within that organization. The model that has been implemented for the Virginia Social Services System establishes Goal Champions and Goal Committees. The Goal Committees are made up of individuals that will assist in the implementation of an action plan specific to that goal. If you wish to become more involved and you have the appropriate approvals you are encouraged to contact the Goal Champion of the goal that interests you.

2.14 Q. *How do employees know what's going on with the strategic planning process?*

Answer: The best place to obtain this type of information is the Strategic Planning web site which can accessed via the Local Agency web page by selecting "Strategic Planning" on the left hand navigation rail. Once within the site there are a number of areas for specific information about the activities of the Goal Committees and a general area on the subject of communications.

2.15 Q. *Is there a central repository for state agency strategic planning activities?*

Answer: A web site has been established as a central repository for all information on strategic planning activities within the Virginia Social Services System. This site can be accessed via the Local Agency web page by selecting "Strategic Planning" on the left hand navigation rail. Once within the site there are a number of areas for specific information about the activities related to strategic planning.

2.16 Q. *Is there a central entity or individual that monitors whether a state agency is meeting its goals and measurements, assesses how well the agency is doing, or nudges it back on track if it veers from its goals?*

Answer: In the past and to some extent the Department of Planning and Budget has been responsible for strategic planning within state government. With the establishment of the *Council for Virginia's Future* and the implementation of HB2097 strategic planning within state government may change. More information on this subject can be found on the *Council for Virginia's Future* web site at www.future.virginia.gov

2.17 Q. *What is the purpose of the strategic plan? Is it geared toward telling the public what we are doing or is it an internal guidance document?*

Answer: The strategic plan is both. First and foremost it is a management tool that is used to guide the organization as it strives to achieve its vision. (for more information see questions 2.1 & 2.3)
It is also a tool for sharing information with the public on the activities of the organization and to be able to demonstrate its progress and performance.

2.18 Q. *How will the Strategic Plan help local agencies increase effectiveness in the primary goal areas?*

Answer: Strategic planning is a management best practice. Two of the main benefits are the communication of the plan and its contents and guidance towards achieving its mission, vision, goals etc. With a strategic plan in place an organization can focus its resources on the things it believes are important at the strategic level. Without such a plan the organization (especially a large organization) will start to fragment its efforts among multiple unfocused priorities.

2.19 Q. *How was the Steering Committee created, who's on it and what is their charter?*

Answer: The System's Strategic Planning Steering Committee first met on September 16, 2003. The initial meeting consisted of local directors, providers, community action agencies, program managers and the commissioner. One item discussed at that meeting was the membership, which is governed by the consensus of the committee. Another item discussed was the charter which was developed by the committee. A list of the current membership and a copy of the charter can be found on the strategic planning website at [Strategic Planning Steering Committee's](#) page.

2.20 Q. *What are the specific goals, strategies and measurements developed to date?*

Answer: The System's Strategic Plan is a living document and as such will change as the organization is affected by internal and external influences. The most current copy of the plan may be found on the strategic planning website at the [Strategic Plan](#) page.

2.21 Q. *Who are the goal champions and who is on each goal work group?*

Answer: Information specific to goal champions and the membership of the goal committee's can be found the strategic planning website at the [Committee's](#) page. Each goal committee has a specific area of the web dedicated to that committee that will list all the relevant information including membership.

2.22 Q. *What has been accomplished to date for each goal?*

Answer: On the strategic planning web site within the area for each goal committee you will find a goal work plan. This plan lists all the information about specific tasks that have been completed or are planned. This work plan is the next level down from the strategies you see in the strategic plan. To find the committee you are interested in go to the [Committee's](#) page of the Strategic Planning web site and select the required committee.

2.23 Q. *How can localities incorporate this strategic plan into their locality and local agency's strategic plan?*

Answer: The VSSS strategic plan sets a direction and vision for the future of social services in the Commonwealth. Each locality can use the plan as a guide in setting local priorities and in asking the critical questions, "How are we doing and where should we focus our resources for maximum effect?"

2.24 Q. *What are the fiscal impacts we may have to consider as we implement the plan?*

Answer: With the implementation of any plan the organization will collectively understand its direction allowing it to align its existing resources accordingly. Also the plan is a useful tool to identify, demonstrate and justify the need for additional resources.

2.25 Q. *How do local directors get involved in helping to do the work needed on the plan?*

Answer: Local directors may become involved by participating with any of the strategic goal teams, working on the Business Process Re-engineering project team or through any of the standing committees of the Virginia League of Social Service Executives.

2.26 Q. *When will pieces of the plan be rolled out and what will localities need to do?*

Answer: The implementation of the plan has already started. The plan is a living document and as such its implementation is ongoing as the System initiates and completes different phases. More detailed information on this subject can be found on the strategic planning website by reviewing the [strategic plan](#) and the individual [goal plans](#).

2.27 Q. *What help will localities need to implement the plan?*

Answer: The assistance a locality may require will vary depending on where they are currently and what areas will be receiving the primary focus.

2.28 Q. *How does performance based budgeting fit in with the VSSS Strategic Planning process?*

Answer: State government planning includes two main elements at the state agency level, the agency's strategic plan and a business type plan for each service called the "Service Plan". The service plan will identify objectives for which the service is requesting funding. These objectives will include information identifying how they align to either the strategic direction of the organization or any mandates that require action.

2.29 Q. *If I do not have a plan, whom can I contact to get help with the process?*

Answer: Any member of the Strategic Plan Steering Committee can be a resource for the strategic planning process.

Document Information

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